

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 12698 101037Z

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INFO USLO PEKING

AMCONSUL HONGKONG

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY KABUL

CINCPAC

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CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CH, IN, PFOR

SUBJECT: SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY. AN ARTICLE IN THE INDIAN EXPRESS BY ITS WELL-KNOWN NEWS EDITOR KULDIP NAYAR HAS PROMPTED A BRIEFING BY AN MEA SPOKESMAN NOTEWORTHY FOR ITS GLOOMY VIEW OF PROSPECTS IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS. THE BRIEFING REFLECTED PUBLICLY THE VIEWS WE AND OTHER FOREIGN MISSIONS HERE HAVE BEEN GETTING FROM SENIOR MINISTRY OFFICIALS. THEY ALSO SEEM LARGELY SHARED BY INDIA'S AMBASSADOR TO PEKING. END INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY.

2. IN HIS ARTICLE, NAYAR CLAIMED THAT THE GOI HAD TURNED A COLD SHOULDER TO PEKING'S FEELERS ON SENDING A GOOD WILL MISSION TO CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NEW DE 12698 101037Z

INDIA, WHICH HE SAID HAD BEEN TAKEN UP WITH MEA BY THE CHINESE EMBASSY HERE IN A ROUNDABOUT WAY. AN MEA SPOKESMAN SUBSEQUENTLY DENIED THAT SUCH AN APPROACH HAD BEEN MADE, AND THE CHINESE HERE HAVE TOLD A BRITISH HICOM OFFICER THAT THERE IS NOTHING TO NAYAR'S STORY. WE UNDERSTAND ON GOOD AUTHORITY THAT NAYAR'S ACCOUNT PROBABLY IS A MISREADING OF THE CONTINUING EFFORTS ON THE PART OF A COUPLE OF "FRIENDSHIP ASSOCIATIONS" TO PROMOTE A GOOD WILL MISSION,

BUT THAT THESE EFFORTS DO NOT HAVE PRC SUPPORT.

3. THE PRESS ACCOUNTS OF THE MEA SPOKESMAN'S DENIAL INCLUDE LENGTHY OBITER DICTA, ATTRIBUTED TO DIPLOMATIC OBSERVERS BUT ALMOST CERTAINLY TRACEABLE TO MEA ITSELF, ON THE UNPROMISING PROSPECTS FOR ANY SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT IN SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS. THE STATESMAN'S ACCOUNT, FOR EXAMPLE, CITES AS UNHELPFUL CHINESE ATTITUDES THE PRC'S CONTINUING SUPPORT OF THE NAGA REBELS, A "VIRULENT" ATTACK ON INDIA BY A HONG KONG PRC ORGAN WHICH STATED THAT "MINI-IMPERIALIST INDIA HAD NOT LEARNT THE LESSON TAUGHT THEM (BY CHINA) ONCE ALREADY", AND THE CHINESE REACTION TO THE RECENT CALL OF THE DALAI LAMA ON GOI LEADERS. ACCORDING TO THE STATESMAN'S "SOURCES", "ON THE FACE OF IT THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE MATERIAL CHANGE IN CHINA'S ATTITUDE TOWARD INDIA. THE CHANGE OF LEADERSHIP IN PEKING MAY HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE DOMESTICALLY, BUT SO FAR AS THAT COUNTRY'S FOREIGN POLICY POSTURES, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO INDIA, ARE CONCERNED, THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE NOTICEABLE CHANGE. TRUE, SOME MOVES TO REVIVE THE LONG FROZEN RELATIONS WITH INDIAN MAY HAVE BEEN INITIATED DURING THE PAST YEAR OR SO, BUT THE CHINESE APPARENTLY HAVE WORKED OUT THEIR OWN PRIORITIES AND, ACCORDING TO THESE, RELATIONS WITH INDIA OBVIOUSLY FIGURE VERY LOW. THEY HAVE FAR MORE SERIOUS PROBLEMS ON HAND VIS-A-VIS THE USA, THE USSR, AND JAPAN".

4. WE HAVE NO READY EXPLANATION OF WHY MEA CHOSE THIS TIME TO GO PUBLIC, OR SEMI-PUBLIC, IN EXPRESSING THIS POINT OF VIEW.

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 12698 101037Z

IT MAY PERHAPS STEM FROM THE RECENT MEETING HERE OF INDIAN EAST ASIAN ENVOYS, WHICH PROVIDED THE MINISTRY AN OPPORTUNITY TO COMPARE NOTES AND COME TO SOME CONCLUSIONS ON SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS. IN ANY EVENT, THE VIEWS WHICH HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED VERY CLOSELY REFLECT THOSE WE HAVE RECENTLY BEEN GETTING FROM FOREIGN SECRETARY JAGAT MEHTA AND WORKING LEVEL OFFICIALS. THESE OFFICIALS SEE NO EVIDENCE OF MODIFICATIONS IN PRC ATTITUDES WHICH WOULD WARRANT ANY SIGNIFICANT INDIAN EFFORT TO IMPROVE RELATIONS. NOR DO WE FIND ANY SIGN OF SERIOUS INTEREST IN MOVING FORWARD ON THE PART OF THE GOI POLITICAL LEADERSHIP OR OF OTHERS IN THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM.

5. IN A RECENT DISCUSSION HERE WITH THE BRITISH HIGH COMMISSIONER, INDIAN AMBASSADOR TO PAKING K.R. NARAYANAN ALSO TOOK A DIM VIEW OF PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVED TIES WITH CHINA. NARAYANAN SAID THAT WHILE CHINA HAD CONSIDERABLE IMPORTANCE IN INDIAN THINKING, INDIA WAS NOT A HIGH-PRIORITY COUNTRY FOR THE PRC. ITS PERCEPTION OF SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS, HE SAID, WAS CONTAINED WITHIN A STRICTLY ASIAN CONTEXT, WHILE INDIA SAW HER RELATIONS WITH CHINA IN A GLOBAL CONTEXT. NARAYANAN SAW CHINA AS AIMING FOR SUPERPOWER STATUS, AND CONSIDERED PEKING'S ACTIVITIES IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD AS INTENDED LARGELY AN AUXILIARY TO ITS GREAT POWER DIPLOMACY. CHINA'S NATURAL SUPERPOWER CONSTITUENCY, IN THIS VIEW, IS ASIA,

AND IT DOES NOT WANT ANY COUNTER-POWERS TO DEVELOP IN THE AREA. IT SEES INDIA AS A NEUTRAL COMPETITOR AND FEARS INDIAN CONQUEST OF PAKISTAN AND BANGLADESH WHICH WOULD ENHANCE INDIA'S POSITION. ITS POLICY IN THE SUBCONTINENT, NARAYANAN HELD, WAS LINKED TO THIS CONSIDERATION, HENCE ITS FEARS WITH INDIA'S NEIGHBORS.

6. SOMEWHAT CONTRADICTORY TO THIS THESIS, NARAYANAN ALSO HELD THAT CHINA RECOGNIZES THE PRE-EMINENCE OF INDIA IN THE SUB-CONTINENT, WELCOMED THE RELAXATION OF TENSION IN THE AREA, AND APPROVED OF THE RECENT VISITS OF THE INDIAN FOREIGN MINISTER DESIGNED TO PROMOTE THIS. HE REASONED THAT THIS ATTITUDE WAS PROMPTED BY OVERRIDING CHINESE CONCERN ABOUT SOVIET INFLUENCE IN THE SAME AREA AND PEKING'S BELIEF THAT A RELAXATION OF TENSION GAVE THE SOVIETS LESS OPPORTUNITY TO MAINTAIN OR IMPROVE ITS

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PAGE 04 NEW DE 12698 101037Z

PRESENT POSITION IN SOUTH ASIA. THERE WERE ALSO LIMITS IN THE CHINESE VIEW TO THE EXTENT OF INDIAN PRE-EMINENCE: PEKING DID NOT WANT HER TO DOMINATE HER NEIGHBORS OR TO EXPAND HER INFLUENCE OUTSIDE THE AREA (TO SOUTHEAST ASIA, FOR ONE).

7. NARAYANAN SAID THAT THE CHINESE HAD WELCOMED THE ELECTION OF DESAI AS A BLOW TO SOVIET AMBITIONS AND AS THE OCCASION FOR THE REMOVAL FROM THE SCENE OF MRS. GANDHI, WHO IN HIS VIEW THEY REGARDED AS AN EXPANSIONIST (UNLIKE DESAI). HE FELT THAT, DESPITE THIS, FUTURE PROGRESS WOULD CONTINUE TO BE VERY SLOW, WITH BOTH SIDES CONTINUING TO BE VERY CAUTIOUS. HE TOLD THE BRITS THAT HE SAW SOME INDICATION OF GREATER CHINESE INTEREST IN COOPERATION IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY, MADE NO MENTION OF TRADE, AND FOUND NEITHER SIDE IN A HURRY TO REACH A SOLUTION OF THE BORDER QUESTION

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